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Preface to the English edition

This book is a translation of *Zwart op Wit*, which was originally published in 2011 and which I worked on between 2006 and 2010. I have chosen not to update it, so the perspective from the time of writing has remained unchanged, both historically and as regards game annotations. I am fully aware that game notes which are not based on engine-produced analysis are rather old-fashioned nowadays, to say the least. But I hope the reader will appreciate that since this book was written by a man looking back on his chess career just a few years after that career had finished, updating the perspective and the insights he then had by some

fifteen years, would radically alter the content. It would in fact mean a completely new book. And while writing one autobiography remains perhaps within the bounds of socially acceptable vanity, writing two would definitely be crossing the line.

I am deeply grateful to Peter Boel for translating the original Dutch text and for taking care of the book generally. My thanks also go to Remmelt Otten, publisher of *New in Chess*, for initiating the whole project. And last but not least I thank Hanneke, my wife, for always supporting me with all my writing projects just like she did in the old days with my chess career.

*Paul van der Sterren
Amstelveen, October 2023*

How this book came about

When I die, it is improbable that anybody will compose a string quartet in my memory. Therefore I will do it myself.

Dmitri Shostakovich

A rather unusual book like this one cannot do without a few words of explanation – justification, perhaps. At quite an early stage, I already conceived the idea of a retrospective of my life as a chess player, or at least a collection of my games. But for years on end, diffidence as well as the attention my active chess career was still demanding withheld me from starting work on it. A stalemate situation. But finally, in 1999, there was some movement. In the quiet of an early summer morning, the short poem *Preface* suddenly settled down in my head, which has been included here as a Preface. Ever since that day, I've been dead certain that I was going to write something, not so much out of vanity – as I do not believe I'm giving such a great account of myself in this book – but as a kind of farewell to the chess world that was my world for such a long time. However, it was only after I had written the last words of *De Wereld van de Schaakopening (Fundamental Chess Openings)* in 2006, not having played a single chess game for years, that I had free time and the

distance from my old chess-playing self was large enough to set to work. In over four years, I played through all the roughly 3,000 games I had saved, browsed through old newspaper cuttings and magazines, looked at my diaries and analyses, and collected everything I could find to stimulate my memory as well as I possibly could. As a result, stories were automatically starting to take shape in my head – stories about what had gone through my head at the time and about the amazement I was feeling now, re-experiencing all the things I had been through. I have not written down all those stories – not by far. The book would have been much thicker than it already is. But the things that passed the 'censorship' – I couldn't get them out of my head anymore. And as the book was slowly taking shape, it became more and more clear to me that I did not only want to write it but also wanted to get it published. Initially, it didn't seem very probable that I would find a publisher who would rate the work at its true value and would also take the risk of ending up with a depot

filled with unsold books, but to my great joy it turned out that my 'own old' publisher, New In Chess, fulfilled both conditions. And so I am grateful to Allard and Dirk Jan for their enthusiasm, and also to Anton, Joop, Peter and René for their much-needed technical support and finishing touches.

The chess-technical comments have been based on the annotations and analyses I made of my games at the time, which mainly proved useful in activating my memory. Even more than the actual moves, it was these old annotations that enabled me to re-experience everything. I even copied some of my original analyses in their entirety to allow the reader a peek into the way I used to work and 'present' myself. Conspicuously absent in this book are computer engines like Fritz, Rybka, Shredder, HIARCS, Stockfish, AlphaZero and whatever else they may be called. Of course, I am aware of the fact that nowadays all chess players, from club players

to world champions, run their games through the Great Mincing Machine of this New Age, from which they then emerge in a neat little raster of variations, provided with orderly evaluations in terms of points.

I'm not very interested in what the machines have to say – not within the scope of this book, at least. My life as a chess player took place before their time, just as it wasn't yet the time of Magnus Carlsen and Anish Giri. I'm not making any new analyses in this book, I am looking back. And what I see when I look back is not computers – with a few exceptions, that will not be left undiscussed. In the meantime, of course, the reader is free to run his engines while playing through the games – in fact, I would even heartily applaud it, as it would be a sign of genuine interest. But I don't think it is either necessary or relevant for what this book is designed to be: an account of a chess player's life.

Amstelveen, February 5th, 2011

1974

It was a very good year

Conceit may be, that comes from youth, that will be corrected if need be...

Dostoyevsky: *The Brothers Karamazov*

There are some episodes in a chess player's life that one can only speak about in lyrical wordings. Unsuspecting, you hop on a train somewhere, you feel a tremendous thrill, you don't know what's happening to you, everything goes well, everything goes better, everything goes even better still, and at the end of the ride you get off and you're on a totally different level. 1974 was such an episode for me – at least, the larger part of that year.

It started – how could it be different? – in spring. Maybe it was the menace of my approaching final exams, or maybe also it was just a natural new phase in a natural growing process, but undeniably, in one way or another, a bundling of my powers took place – not only for the final exams but also, and chiefly, for a new jump forward in the chess world.

I had been quite content with my life as a secondary school student. The atmosphere at St Thomas College was stimulating, I was in a nice class, I had friends, and I enjoyed prestige thanks to my chess successes. As for the school work, I did more or less what was

necessary to keep up and in the meantime spent as much time as I could on chess study. Thus, I would start my homework sessions, for example, with a tough hour of mathematics, and would then go on to immensely enjoy the wonderful logic of endgame theory. I was happy to close my books on Dutch literature too (alas, I was not ripe for them at the time), turning instead to an autobiography of Keres, Alekhine or any other chess player. And I guess it's clear that I found the analysis of openings much more attractive than that of questions regarding physics or biology.

But now all this was going to change. After my final exam, I wanted to study in Amsterdam, and obviously that was to be the start of an entirely new life. I was going to have my own room and would be on my own in the big city, far away from home, far away from my friends. Several months before I went, a wondrous feeling of freedom and independence already started creeping up on me. I would be free – free to get up late, to do whatever I wanted and, above all, to spend all of my time on chess. A

fantastic, overwhelmingly exciting prospect.

Just like in the period of 1970-1971, I was facing a big new challenge – actually, a whole series of new challenges, and this time too, they had a stimulating effect. It started with me coming second in the Dutch Junior Championship, behind Roy Dieks, who was unstoppable in those days. This was an important success since it meant I was entitled to participate in ‘Groningen’, the European Junior Championship held annually around the turn of the year in this city in the north of the Netherlands in the 1970s. Next, I passed my final exams with flying colours, moved into a spacious attic room in Amsterdam, enjoyed my freedom to the fullest, won all the summer tournaments I participated in, turned the Dutch chess community on its head by qualifying for the national championship, shone in the European Junior Championship – in short, a star was born...

Oh no, that’s right, I wasn’t going to do this. Again!

But still, these lines with their out-of-control enthusiasm reflect something of the way I experienced it all at the time. Something did break loose, and something broke open, and even though the successes were not as outrageous

as I suggested above (just like the exam and the spacious attic room), the fact is that I did reach a higher playing level.

Because of this, my orientation on the chess world changed as well. When you’re eighteen, youth tournaments approach their climax and also their endpoint. This was a challenge in itself, but, inevitably, the world of ‘adults’ was coming into view as well – a world I had been ignoring in the two preceding years. But I couldn’t ignore it any longer, since that was where my future lay. And it turned out to be possible, too – both trajectories were exceedingly successful for me. As regards the youth tournaments: after the Dutch Junior Championship, which went favourably for me, followed by a few smaller events, the international top came into view with the European Junior Championship in Groningen. And as regards the adult chess world: after my not really excellent (but highly inspiring) participation in the Open Dutch Championship in Velp, I surprised friend and foe (as it is called – more correct would be ‘myself and a few opponents’) by qualifying for next year’s real Dutch Championship. So, my connection to the Dutch top – or at least sub-top – echelons was coming into view. When I noticed that, my previous orientation level (Limburg) disappeared automatically.

What you need to be able to handle in such tournaments – if things go well! – is decisive games, both for an end result (tournament victory, for instance) and having to survive a confrontation with opponents who are rated (much) higher than you. Contrary to what many people think, this ability is never ever based on willpower. It is always the result of an entire series of favourable circumstances coinciding, and then you simply have to rise above yourself. You're not doing this of your own free will! It feels like your opponents are forcing you to beat them.

What is necessary first is a really strong challenge, and second, the unformulated feeling that you're able to face up to that challenge, or rather the absence of the idea that you won't be able to.

And this is precisely where that transformational feeling of freedom and independence that came over me in 1974 made the difference. Disentangled from your old life and your old limitations, you are, as a consequence, also disentangled from your old 'ceiling', the (subconscious) idea you always have about what you can and what you can't do. You push your boundaries until... new boundaries restrict you again, which is the inevitable next stage in this process and is the subject of the next chapter.

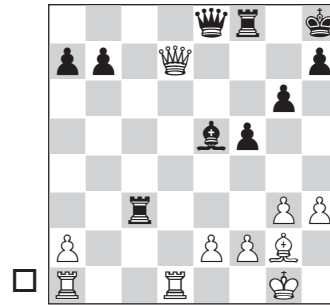
But let's first take a seat at the chessboard. I have precious memories of the following fragment.

Game 11

Paul van der Sterren

Meindert van der Linde

Youth training KNSB, Utrecht 1974



22. ♖ab1 ♜c7 23. ♝xb7! ♜xd7

24. ♞xd7 ♚xd7

There is indeed no other remedy against the threat of 25. ♜xh7+ ♔g8 26. ♙d5+. However, it's not only because of this correct queen sacrifice that I found (and find) this game so beautiful but also because of my efficient conversion of the technical ending. That was certainly not an easy task!

25. ♞xd7 a5 26. ♞a7 ♙c3 27. ♙d5 ♞e8 28. e3 ♙b4 29. ♔g2 ♞e7 30. ♞a8+ ♔g7 31. h4 ♞d7 32. ♙b3 ♔f6 33. ♔f3 h6 34. ♞a6+ ♔g7 35. h5!

Just look how smoothly this is all going.

35...gxf5 36. ♔f4 ♙e1 37. f3 h4

38. gxf4 ♙xh4 39. ♔xf5 ♙e1

40. ♞g6+ ♔h7 41. ♙g8+ ♔h8 42. ♙e6 ♞d3 43. ♔f6

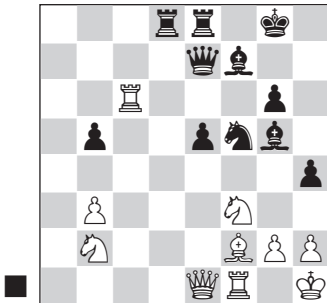
And even mate as well. I'd love to play such games every day. And the odd thing is: I did, in those days! The following game, for example, gave me a tremendous thrill.

Game 12

Jac. Vaassen

Paul van der Sterren

Limburg Championship 1974



36...e4 37. ♕c5 exf3!

Another queen sacrifice, but what is a queen sacrifice here?

38. ♕xe7 fxg2+ 39. ♖xg2 ♖xe7

40. ♗c3 ♕d5+ 41. ♖g1 ♕e3+ 42. ♜f2 ♕xc6 43. ♗xc6 ♜d2

It's quite clear that the white queen is no match for the black pieces.

44. ♗c8+ ♖h7

And White resigned. For days afterwards, I was rapturous about this game – or rather, about the wondrous way in which everything had gone by itself in the concluding phase.

I notice that today I look differently at my games that were played roughly beginning from this period. Playing through my earlier games mainly evokes feelings of endearment and nostalgia in me, but I take a much more attentive and more critical view of my games from 1974 onwards (though you might think differently when you

read the jubilant commentaries above).

Apparently, there is some sort of recognition. My 'adult' chess-playing self acknowledges having played these games, takes responsibility for them, and automatically starts analysing.

Another indispensable ingredient for true progress is the art of defence. Being able to patiently sit out a long siege with no other prospect than notching up a half-point is an art in itself.

In this respect, I have learned a lot from my great rival Peter Scheeren, who was a master of this art already at a very young age. I think I start to perceive the first symptoms of mastering this art in a game I played during a youth match between Switzerland and the Netherlands in Rapperswil, May 1974.

Game 13 Sicilian Defence

Walter Bichsel

Paul van der Sterren

Rapperswil 1974

1.e4 c5 2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♕b5 g6 4.0-0 ♕g7 5.c3 ♘f6 6. ♞e1 0-0 7.h3 a6 8. ♕f1 d5 9.e5 ♘d7 10.d4 cxd4 11.cxd4 ♘b6 12. ♘c3 f6 13.exf6 exf6 14.b4!

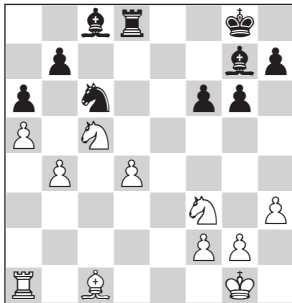
White takes the initiative. The opening is a fiasco for Black (after the game I had hardly any idea of what I'd done wrong – an oppressive feeling).

14...♖e8 15.♗xe8+ ♜xe8 16.a4 ♖d8
The more passive 16...♙e6 17.a5 ♘d7
does not look good either.

17.a5 ♘c4 18.♙xc4 dxc4 19.♖e2
♖d6 20.♖xc4+

Too greedy. It would have been
much harder for Black after
20.♙a3!

20...♙e6 21.♖c5 ♖d8 22.♖xd6
♖xd6 23.♘e4 ♖d8 24.♘c5 ♙c8

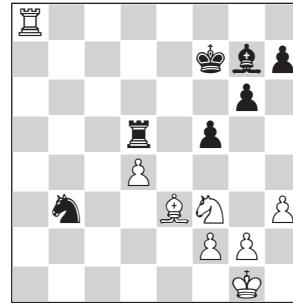


The defence is entering a new
phase, in which two factors are
crucial. Firstly, there is not a single
ray of hope left of ever winning
this game. This is an important
psychological problem that often
leads to the ruin of the defending
player. You can only overcome it by
reconciling yourself entirely with
the situation and finding it just as
exciting to fight for a draw as it is,
in better times, to fight for a win.
Secondly, as Black, you know that
while you are close to a draw, you
are at the same time miles away
from it. Obviously, your opponent
is going to try everything he can
to take you down. This requires
patience and stamina.

25.♙e3 ♘xb4 26.♖b1 ♘c6 27.♘xb7
♙xb7 28.♖xb7 ♘xa5 29.♖a7 ♘b3!

Much stronger than the passive
29...♖d6 30.♙f4 ♖b6 31.d5.

30.♖xa6 f5 31.♙g5 ♖d5 32.♖a8+
♗f7 33.♙e3



33...♙xd4 34.♘g5+ ♗g7 35.♙xd4+
♘xd4 36.♖a7+ ♗h6

Now, this is a little too fanatical,
even though it ends well. As a
trainer, I would have had a serious
word with me for not playing the
simple 36...♗f6.

37.h4 ♗h5 38.♖xh7+ ♗g4 39.♗h2 f4
40.f3+ ♗f5 41.♖f7+ ♗e5 42.♘e4

Here the game was adjourned.
42...♘f5 43.♖h7 ♖d8 44.♘g5 ♖a8

Draw.
Boring, eh? But you're supposed
to be just as glad about such an
outcome as about any magnificent
win – and I was.

Another change in my opening
repertoire occurred around this
time – a hardening, you might
say. Under Hans Bouwmeester's
influence, I reduced my White
repertoire back to only 1.e4 and
tried to master this smaller
repertoire more thoroughly now.
With Black, the Pirc and the
King's Indian disappeared into the

background, and I started playing the French against 1.e4 and the Queen's Gambit Accepted against 1.d4.

This latter opening was highly uncommon at the time – certainly among young players – and it gave rise to some surprised glances initially. I don't know how I got the idea – perhaps it was simply because it was, coincidentally, the first chapter in Taimanov's book on the Queen's Gambit – but it immediately felt right. After an adolescent period of 'playing around the centre', such a classical strategy (this also goes for the French) was a revelation for me, or perhaps I should say I was ready for it now. I can't resist showing you one of my early successes with this opening: my game (if you can call it that) with Rob Witt from the final round of the Dutch Open in Velp. It's silly, and it doesn't do any justice at all to my opponent's qualities (by the way, I struck up a good friendship with Rob in the years after this game and cooperated a lot with him – more on that later), but it brought me so much pleasure – the same kind of pleasure Yasser Seirawan demonstrated in the 1991 Hoogovens Tournament when he burst out in uncontrollable (though discrete!) laughter seeing how I'd lost in twelve moves to Manuel Bosboom in the final round (see Game 179): all you can do in such a situation is laugh.

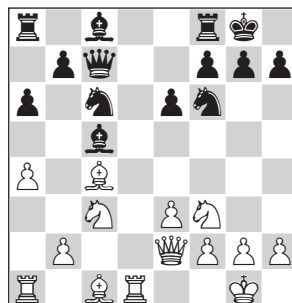
Game 14 Queen's Gambit Accepted

Rob Witt

Paul van der Sterren

Velp 1974

**1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 dxc4 4.e3 e6
5.♙xc4 c5 6.0-0 a6 7.a4 ♘c6 8.♚e2
♙e7 9.♞d1 ♚c7 10.♗c3 0-0 11.dxc5
♙xc5**



12.e4? ♗g4 13.♞f1?? ♗d4

And White resigned.

The next game carries a little more weight. It reflects some of the power of my new White repertoire. In fact, in it, you can discern a kind of foreshadowing of what my opening treatment would look like years later – in broad terms: play healthy, classical variations and react sharply if your opponent plays something funny.

Ian Rogers once formulated this approach as follows (about someone else, but it might very well have been about me): '1. follow the book, 2. when the opponent makes a new move, assume this must be bad, 3. refute!'. An excellent method, except when your opponent's new move is actually good.

Game 15 Sicilian Defence
Paul van der Sterren
Jon Speelman

Vlissingen 1974

This game was played on the youth board of a then-traditional match between the Netherlands and England. This too was a highly stimulating event for me.

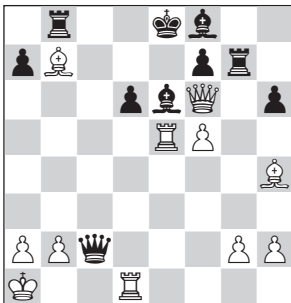
1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 d6 6.♙g5 ♙d7 7.♚d2 ♜c8 8.0-0 ♘xd4 9.♚xd4 ♚a5 10.f4 e6 11.♙b1 ♜g8?

A brilliant move, but, of course, that doesn't make it any less crazy. It's a typical Speelman move. In later years, he would play many more such moves against me, but then their level was higher and they had stronger follow-ups, making things much more difficult for me.

12.e5 ♜xc3 13.exf6 ♜c6 14.♙d3 gxf6 15.♚xf6 h6 16.♙h4 ♜c8 17.f5 e5 18.♙e4 ♚c7 19.♜he1 ♜g4?

Now it goes all wrong.

20.♙d5 ♚xc2+ 21.♙a1 ♜g7 22.♙xb7 ♜b8 23.♜xe5+ ♙e6



24.♙c6+!

Ah, to be allowed to make such moves again – if only in my dreams!

24...♚xc6 25.fxe6 fxe6 26.♜xe6+ ♙d7 27.♜exd6+ ♙xd6 28.♚xg7+ ♙c8 29.♚xh6 1-0

Against 1.e4, there was also a less solid but highly effective weapon that appeared in my repertoire: the Sveshnikov Variation. This system, still completely unknown at the time, was introduced in the Netherlands by Hans Bouwmeester during a training weekend for youth players. For quite some time, I enjoyed playing this variation too, mainly because nobody believed that it could be correct. One player would hit the wall, another would flee in panic, driven crazy by the inconceivable powers hidden in Black's set-up. For a rebellious youth, of course, such a contrarian variation is wonderful.

The high point and the endpoint of this episode were without a doubt the European Junior Championships in Groningen that I've mentioned a few times already. I can only describe what I experienced here as a feast, a full immersion lasting almost three weeks, a rush. The atmosphere among the participants, the many spectators, the fans, the interest of the press – it was like a warm bath for a boy who suddenly knew (or thought he knew) he was performing the kind of heroic role he had always been dreaming of. In fact, I experienced everything a hero usually experiences: glory

and disgrace, victories thought impossible and dramatic defeats, fabulous escapes and childish blunders. And it was all highly exciting since I competed in the struggle for first place from the beginning to the end. I enjoyed this tournament to the full, and even though I maintained during interviews that I still wasn't looking forward to a career as a professional chess player, the world outside chess had clearly degenerated even further into what it largely was already: a backdrop.

The tournament was divided into preliminaries and finals. The climax of the preliminaries was my game against the Russian Alexander Ivanov. We see here a few characteristic aspects of my play in those days.

Game 16 Sicilian Defence

Alexander Ivanov
Paul van der Sterren

Groningen 1974/75

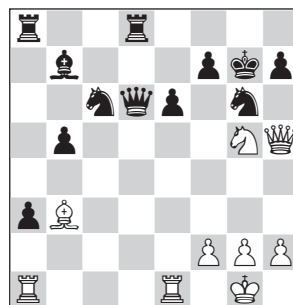
1.e4 c5 2.c3 ♟f6 3.e5 ♞d5 4.d4 cxd4 5.cxd4 d6 6.♟f3 ♞c6 7.♟c4 e6 8.0-0 ♟e7 9.♞bd2 dxe5 10.dxe5 0-0 11.♞e1 ♞c7 12.a3 ♞d8

A sound opening treatment.

13.♞e2 ♟f4 14.♞e4 ♞g6 15.b4 a6 16.♟b2 b5 17.♟b3 ♟b7 18.♞g4 a5 19.♞e4

An opponent fritzing out.

19...axb4 20.♞d6 ♟xd6 21.exd6 ♞xd6 22.♞h5 bxa3 23.♟xg7 ♟xg7 24.♞g5



24...♞d4!

Fearlessness.

25.♞xh7+ ♟f6 26.♞xf7 ♞h8?

A blunder in a winning position (26...♞c6 27.f3 ♞h8 would have won at once).

27.♞xg6+?

Missing 27.♞xh8+, though it should be added that Black keeps a winning position after 27...♞xh8 28.♞xd6 ♞xb3 or 27...♟xf7 28.♞h7+ ♟f6 29.♞xb7 ♞h8.

27...♟xg6 28.♞xd6 ♞a6 29.♞xb7 ♞xb3 30.♞a2 ♞c8 31.♟f1 b4

White resigned.

And afterwards: euphoria.

In the finals, there was lots of drama, culminating in, and aptly summarized by, my game against Peter Szekely in the penultimate round.

Game 17 Sicilian Defence

Paul van der Sterren
Peter Szekely

Groningen 1974/75

1.e4 c5 2.♟f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♞xd4 ♟f6 5.♞c3 a6 6.♟e2 ♞c7 7.0-0 e5 8.♞b3 ♟e6 9.f4 ♞bd7 10.a4 ♟e7

11. ♖h1 0-0 12. ♕e3 exf4 13. ♖xf4
 ♗e5 14. a5 ♖fe8 15. ♗d4 ♖ac8
 16. ♗f5 ♕f8 17. ♖d2 ♗g6 18. ♗h6+
 ♗h8 19. ♖f2 ♖d8 20. ♕b6 ♖d7
 21. ♕d4 ♗e5 22. ♖af1 ♖xc3 23. ♖xf6
 ♖xc2 24. ♖xc2 gxf6 25. ♖d2 ♕g7
 26. ♕h5 ♖e7 27. ♕c3 ♖d8 28. ♗f5
 ♕xf5 29. ♖xf5 ♗g6 30. ♖d5 ♖c8
 31. ♖f1 ♗g8 32. ♕d1 ♗e5 33. ♕b3
 ♗h8 34. ♖d1 ♕f8



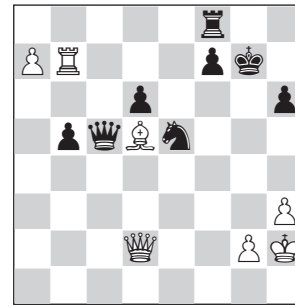
After a lengthy phase of not-too-shabby manoeuvring,

35. h3 ♖c7 36. ♕b4 ♖c6 37. ♖d2
 ♖c8 38. ♖d5 ♖c6 39. ♗h2 ♖c7
 40. ♖f1 ♖e7 41. ♖d2 ♕g7 42. ♕d5
 ♖c8 43. ♕c3 ♖d7 44. ♖e2 ♖e7
 45. ♖a1 ♗c6 46. ♖g4 ♖c7 47. ♖a3
 ♗e5 48. ♖e2 f5 49. exf5 ♖g5 50. ♖b3
 ♖xf5 51. ♖xb7 ♖c8 52. ♖e4 ♖f2
 53. ♖e1 ♖c5 54. ♖e4 ♖f2 55. ♖e1
 ♖c5 56. ♕b3 ♖f8 57. ♖d2 ♗c6
 58. ♕xg7+ ♗xg7 59. ♕d5 ♗e5 60. b4
 ♖c8

a decisive breakthrough:



61. b5 axb5 62. a6 ♖c5 63. a7 h6,
 a bizarre blunder:



64. ♕xf7?? ♗xf7 65. ♖xf7+ ♗xf7
 66. ♖f4+ ♗g7 67. ♖xf8+ ♗xf8
 68. a8 ♖+ ♗g7 69. ♖b7+ ♗g6
 70. ♖e4+ ♖f5 71. ♖e8+

and a present from my opponent: a draw offer.

In the final round, I beat Roy Dieks and took third place. A great success, but this was also the point where, as will become clear, I was thrown off the train.

1988

Thessaloniki

How awesome is this place!

This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Genesis 28:16-17

There are few things as healthy for a man as a successful holiday, and there are few holidays so successful as a journey through unfamiliar but fascinating territory. Fascination takes complete possession of you, eases you away from your home routine of chores, worries and ever-returning thoughts, and empties your head.

Ever since I had played in Lone Pine in 1978 (and maybe much earlier), it had been one of my dreams to make a really long trip through America, but for years on end, the financial and mental barriers had been too high. Apparently, now was the time. Our financial situation was good, the journey to Australia two years earlier had removed our mental barriers, and suddenly the idea was there. Hanneke and Paul would go to America for five weeks.

I think that ever since I began when I was thirteen, I had never been without chess for more than a few days in a row. At home, of course, chess was always around me, but I would also put a pocket chessboard and a few books or magazines in my luggage on all my

longer vacations. And I would never leave them untouched either. On evenings, lazy mornings or 'rest days' during the holiday, I would always play through a couple of games, read something, or look at an endgame.

But this was different. I had indeed taken a few books with me, but – I noticed it after a few days, I even worried about it after a few weeks, but there was nothing to be done about it – I wasn't going to consult them. Tarrasch's *Dreihundert Schachpartien* would have fascinated me immensely at home, but on our drive through the harrowing Utah and Nevada deserts it was just dead weight. I always loved to study endgames, but even the wonderful books by Smyslov and Averbakh paled in comparison with the geysers, waterfalls and bison of Yellowstone Park – just ink on paper.

You just don't think about it anymore. It falls away. Gone. Empty. And that is, of course, precisely what makes such vacations so wholesome. You can't tear yourself loose from chess, but you can be torn loose from it. That is what this

journey did for me. We arrived back home tanned, rested, and bursting with energy.

And I knew that great deeds were going to be done. In fact, having become half-Americanized, I couldn't imagine deeds to be anything else but great the way this land is great and life is, too. So what did I do by way of preparation for my next tournament? I conceived a plan to win it.

The 1988 Olympiad is engraved in my memory as the most wonderful I ever played and as one of the all-time highlights in my life as a chess player.

But why, actually? The organization, the city, the hotel and the playing hall in which I had felt so ill at ease four years earlier were still exactly the same. In the final round, I missed a grandmaster result by letting a totally winning endgame against John Nunn peter out to a draw. Because of this, the Netherlands didn't end unshared second – we had to share this prize with England and even though we had just beaten them, they were awarded the silver medals according to some absurd tiebreak rules. Why, why? What was it that turned this 'awesome place' into the 'gate of heaven'? Or maybe an awesome place is always the gate to heaven??

Let's not get too pretentious here. Let's try to entwine my personal

report on how I perceived the event with a more or less objective rendering. What was it that happened again?

On November 11th, we left Schiphol. In the airplane, I already explained to my teammates a simple strategy I had invented shortly before. It would guarantee us a medal.

A study of the final standings of previous Olympiads had taught me that a total score of 35 board points had always been good for at least bronze in the past. What is 35 board points? In fourteen rounds, playing on four boards in each round, it means seven points over fifty percent. Plus 14, in other words, or precisely plus one per match. Viewed in this way, it didn't seem an impossible task already. But if you consider that 4-0 in the first round and 3-1 in the second are perfectly realistic results, then you've already made a considerable head start on this scheme, and you only have to win eight of the remaining twelve matches with a 2½-1½ score and tie four matches 2-2. This ought to be possible if everyone is in good shape and no disasters happen, oughtn't it?

Of course, my teammates received my analysis with scepticism, and we didn't do much with it in practice. The team consensus was to aim for a spot in the top 10 and hope for seventh place which would give us the right to take part in the World Team Championship in

Lucerne next year. That would be an enormous success already. But in hindsight, we can see I was totally correct! We started with 4-0 against Hong Kong and 3-1 against Mexico, and then, right until the end, we kept playing perfectly according to the scheme, with only one ugly miss along the way (a 1½-2½ defeat against Iceland) which was, however, beautifully compensated by the fact that we twice won 3-1, against Scotland and Germany. We ended up half a point behind schedule but conquered bronze anyway, so there was even some margin. That I, who invented this plan, would spoil the decisive half-point that would have given us silver, was just another example of the beautiful irony of Fate. But I digress – or rather, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Who were 'we' then? In board order, 'we' were John van der Wiel, Genna Sosonko, myself, Jeroen Piket, Rini Kuijf and Rudy Douven, with Frans Kuijpers as the captain. It was the best team the Netherlands 'ever' had – let's not pretend to be modest or historically accurate – not according to rating or titles (only two grandmasters, which actually wasn't bad at all in those days) but as a combat unit.

What makes a team a unit is impossible to capture in formulae, but doubtlessly it starts with an elementary willingness to accept each other, step over differences

and focus on a collective goal. Next, it's simply a question of whether there is chemistry between the members in practice. Finally, a successful start in the tournament can be a decisive spark to get the motor running. In a long, exhausting Olympiad, this elusive phenomenon of 'unity' is much more important than titles, rating numbers and whatnot. Probably, most chess players are too individualistic by definition, and too selfish also, to be able to function in a team, that is to say not to destroy it (unknowingly) from within. Even if they do their best – by their own standards – to be social, real team behaviour is simply outside their scope and beyond their capabilities. This doesn't mean that a non-team can't be successful, purely on the basis of individual class. The Soviet Union team, for example, was successful all the time in those years. But within our team, there was chemistry. Especially the debutants, Piket, Kuijf and Douven, rejuvenated and livened up the atmosphere enormously, and we, the 'older ones', felt good about that. Moreover, the differences in playing strength were not too big and everyone was more or less on the same wavelength. We ate, drank, analysed and discussed things together with lots of enjoyment, and during the team meetings we could simply sense that the collective interest of the

team was the unambiguous priority for each one of its members.

Probably the deciding factor was that we had a good start, successes came, and everyone was genuinely happy with them. There was no jealousy, no envy. It wasn't like 'I won, and you only drew' but 'WE won, WE are doing well.'

Ah, why try to say something sensible about this immortal team? In the end, I could have just hugged them all – in fact, this did happen after I had thrown away the win in the final round. It was solidarity until the bitter end.

The start was perfect. 4-0 against Hong Kong, and each victory was easy, without any shadow sides. This immediately created the first problem – at least, it would have been a problem in different times: everyone had played well so nobody wanted to step back. But it's not such a bad thing to step back as long as you don't get the idea that you're not considered to be strong enough. When, during the team meeting, captain Frans Kuijpers proposed that Piket and Kuijf step back, nobody opposed it. That was something I'd never seen before. Now it was time for the real stuff. The 3-1 victory over Mexico was hard-fought. For the first time, there was a draw that needed to be achieved with great difficulty (Rudy Douven succeeded).

The first small setback was the 2-2 tie (four draws) against Cuba in the

fourth round. With the positions we had on the boards, we had hoped to win.

3-1 versus Scotland thanks to victories by Jeroen Piket and Rini Kuijf, and a jubilant mood in the team.

The first rest day of the tournament immediately meant a second rest day for me, as the first time I didn't play was in the fifth round against Czechoslovakia. Rudy Douven was the matchwinner. He beat Pekarek on board four while Van der Wiel, Sosonko and Piket made draws. This was the first time we beat one of the really strong countries!

It was also the first time we played 'on stage', in the screened-off part of the playing hall where the four top matches of the event took place. A stimulating experience.

Each one of us played extremely professionally and this was very satisfactory, especially for Sosonko. Safe play without too much risk. After five rounds, we hadn't lost a single game yet. Also, we were increasingly trustful that one of us would always win. You never felt the need to force things.

But then all hell broke loose. It started with the first real setback: the loss against Iceland. We dealt with it tremendously well by beating China in the next round. Then followed a short battle break with four solid and fairly short draws against Hungary. We regarded this as an enormous boost

since Hungary was one of the top teams. In round nine, we hit rock bottom: we almost lost to the Philippines – among others because I ruined a totally winning position against Mascarinas. Thanks to Jeroen's determination, who managed to win a drawn endgame in three sessions, we managed to avoid the worst but we were still shaken for a while, until... we beat Germany 3-1 on the next day. Huge celebrations.

All our individual losses (only four in total!) happened in the second phase of the tournament. Rini lost against Iceland, Rudy against China, and both John and I against the Philippines.

The third, decisive phase started with the match against the Soviet Union, and I think the enormous power we showed in the final three rounds was largely thanks to the 2-2 we scored in this match and the way it was achieved.

After a few hours of play, Genna, who had already made a draw with Yusupov, proposed to our captain to offer a 2-2 tie. Frans didn't see much point in this – 'they'll never accept', but Genna fearlessly stepped up to the Russian captain Makarichev and asked him what he thought about it. 'I'll have to ask Kasparov,' was the answer. Genna immediately called in the World Champion (who, to our fortune, didn't play on this day) and gave him a tour of the boards. 'Mmm,

Karpov... bad position. Mmm, Beliavsky, mmm... highly suspect. Mmm, Ivanchuk... looks dangerous. Okay, 2-2 is fine.' Makarichev, slightly overwhelmed, hesitated – to be certain, he also asked Karpov (who rebounded the ball: 'that's your job'), still hesitated, until Genna also negotiated this final hurdle by personally (and, of course, totally irregularly) stopping the clock at the board of Beliavsky and Piket. Kuijf (against Ivanchuk) immediately understood what was going on and followed his example. The arbiter was completely sidelined and flabbergasted. Ivanchuk was angry – he disagreed, but there was no way back for Makarichev and the 2-2 tie was a fact.

A fabulous stunt by Genna, not so much because of the result, since we might have managed that anyway, but because of the unique way he determined, all by himself, the result of a match on the highest level. Fantastic!

The final rounds were a highlight in Dutch Olympiad history. Without losing another game, we drew the match with the USA, beat Sweden (thanks to a win by Rini Kuijf) and in the all-decisive final round, in which a defeat would have thrown us far back and a tie would have sufficed for a spot in the top-7 (which had been our ultimate goal initially), we beat England. We didn't step aside for anyone. But the devil was in the detail.

1994

Van der Sterren-Kamsky

'Is he always so stupid?'

'Yes. He doesn't believe in miracles.'

From the opera The Makropulos Case by Leos Janacek

When I arrived with my team in Wijk aan Zee on January 14th, I felt relieved. It was going to start now. Over with the long, sometimes mind-numbing preparation phase, over with the frustrating feeling of standing on the sideline. Finally, life went on!

My team consisted of Hanneke, Gert-Jan de Boer and Rini Kuijf. Rini only came to Wijk aan Zee during the day as I didn't want to have too much fuss around me. If there was one thing I had needed during tournaments in the past years, it was peace.

Some people questioned my choice of seconds. Why didn't I ask a couple of stronger players, grandmasters, with much experience and understanding? However, I didn't have any doubt that I needed a team of friends in the first place – people I could be sure were behind me, who really wanted me to win and would not be walking around with some hidden frustration, thinking, 'I should have been the one sitting here'. I even preferred not to have Laszlo Hazai on the spot, although our training session in October had gone

excellently. It would have put too much emphasis on the result for my liking.

And I didn't have many illusions about the result. Together with Anand and Kramnik, Kamsky was regarded as one of the crown princes for the world title. I knew I would be facing an opponent who was stronger than me.

But I didn't see this as a reason, or even as an excuse, to lose. On the contrary! Precisely the fact that Kamsky was the favourite was a great challenge for me, and the reason why it was so wonderful to play this match. Even though Kamsky was only 19, and I was 37, I was the hero in this boys' adventure story. Would I be able to beat this small giant?

Game 236 King's Indian Defence

Paul van der Sterren

Gata Kamsky

Candidates Match Wijk aan Zee 1994, Game 1

**1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6
5.♘f3 0-0 6.♙e2 e5 7.♙e3**

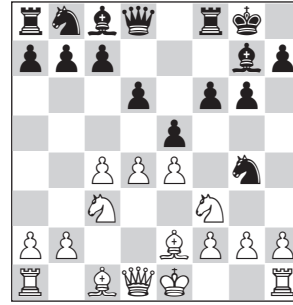
It's too embarrassing for words, especially after what I told you

about my preparation for this match, but my choice for this variation can easily be called improvisation. Kamsky hadn't played many King's Indians in his life, so we hadn't taken this opening into consideration all this time. I had mainly expected the Slav, his main weapon against 1.d4, and had intensively prepared for that with Rini.

On the eve of the first round of the Gothenburg Interzonal in 1955, Hein Donner asked his second Orbaan, 'Say, Constant, what do you play against 1.e4?' and on the following day, to Constant's dismay, played exactly that reply against the great Paul Keres and made a smooth draw with it (it was the Sicilian Four Knights Variation).

In the same way, I concluded, while going through the different scenarios with Gert-Jan on the eve of the first game, that I didn't actually have anything prepared against the King's Indian. So now I played... an old pet variation of my second. I have to add, though, that I'd played this before in the past, just as, of course, the closely related 7.0-0 ♘c6 8.♙e3. So this wasn't such a tall tale as Donner's, who even pulled the same stunt again one day later and made another draw with a world top player, this time with the Burn Variation of the French against Efim Geller.

7... ♗g4 8.♙g5 f6 9.♙c1



9...exd4

But it worked well! Kamsky turned out to be totally unprepared for this system and immediately started improvising.

10. ♗xd4 f5

And not without venom. 11.exf5? runs into the whopping 11... ♗xf2! 12.♙xf2 ♖h4+ and Black wins.

White has to choose between

11.♙xg4 fxg4 and:

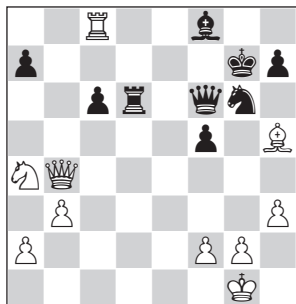
11.0-0 ♗c6?!

But this move suggests he doesn't know his own strength. He could have reduced White's opening advantage to almost nil with the surprising 11...fxe4! 12.♙xg4 (12.♗xe4? ♗xh2!) 12...♙xg4 13.♖xg4 ♙xd4 14.♖xe4 ♗c6.

12. ♗xc6 bxc6 13.exf5 gxf5 14.h3 ♗f6?!

In my opinion, 14... ♗e5 would have been better. With this move, Black (more or less) forces 15.f4 which gives him some targets for counterplay, even though White certainly has the better chances after 15... ♗g6 16.♙f3 ♙d7 17.♙e3 ♖b8 18.♖d2.

15.♙f3 ♙d7 16.♙g5 ♖b8 17.♖d2 ♖e8 18.♖ae1 ♖f7 19.b3 ♗h8



In a chess-technical sense, everything had gone beyond expectations so far. With a plus pawn, a better pawn structure and actively placed pieces, the win should actually be a matter of ‘some consolidation’.

But one thing these moves don’t show is that I had been extremely nervous during the entire game and had used a lot of time to keep my nerves under control. And although Kamsky hadn’t done much better in this respect and he had even less time left than I at this point (2 minutes versus 4), the tension unloaded itself in a catastrophic way for me here. Haunted by the clock and perhaps simply unable to believe that I was on my way to a smooth win in my first game in a Candidates Match, I now played neither the powerful 32. ♖c3! (after which the endgame is winning) nor a reasonably strong B-move like 32. ♖e1. Instead, I quickly played an utterly wretched move:

32. ♖b7+?? ♘h6

It would be an understatement to say that White has made things unnecessarily difficult for himself

with the nervous little check on b7. The game is over in a flash! 33. ♙xg6 is met by 33... ♖d1+ 34. ♚h2 ♙d6+ 35.g3 ♙xg3+! when White gets mated, 33. ♙e2 runs into 33... ♗f4 34. ♙f1 ♖d1 with a winning attack, and on

33. ♙f3

disaster strikes with

33... ♗h4.

Suddenly, all of Black’s pieces are aimed at the white king and all of White’s pieces are out of play. I still managed to come up with

34. ♙e2 ♖a1+ 35. ♙f1

but after

35... ♗f3+! 36.gxf3 ♗g6+

I resigned, flabbergasted. What had happened here?

However, I think I managed to turn the switch quickly.

Gert Ligterink recorded the following conversation in *de Volkskrant*: “A pity,” said someone against Van der Sterren when he left the arena. “Stupid,” was the concise reply.’ And according to Paul Boersma in *AD*, I looked ‘quite spry’ after the game.

I must have realized immediately that mentally lingering in your moment of doom is the stupidest thing to do in such a situation.

Game 237 Ruy Lopez

Gata Kamsky

Paul van der Sterren

Candidates Match Wijk aan Zee 1994, Game 2

1.e4 e5

I even suspect that the first game gave me a tremendous thrill. Of course, I had lost (and that was a pity, it surely was), but I had outplayed my opponent straight from the opening, and that boosted my confidence.

So I started the second game in good spirits and bursting with energy. We had taken off; the match could start.

**2. ♘f3 ♘c6 3. ♙b5 a6 4. ♙a4 ♘f6
5. 0-0 ♙e7 6. ♖e1 b5 7. ♙b3 d6 8. c3
0-0 9. h3 ♘b8**

And this time the opening was at the heart of my preparation.

I had studied the Breyer so exhaustively with Laszlo Hazai that it was almost coming out of my ears! This may sound negative, and it can make you nauseous at a certain point during such a training session, but the result is that you feel very strong if you get it on the board.

**10. d4 ♘bd7 11. ♘bd2 ♙b7 12. ♙c2
♖e8 13. ♘f1 ♙f8 14. ♘g3 g6 15. b3**



As far as I knew, Kamsky had never faced the Breyer before, but of course he knew he could expect me to play it and came well-prepared.

The traditional main line is 15.a4, but the text move was just starting to become fashionable. In 1993, in a friendly match, Judit Polgar had used it to combat no less a player than Boris Spassky, one of the greatest experts of the Closed Ruy Lopez and the Breyer in particular. In my opinion, the move is really stronger than 15.a4 and is one of the most dangerous methods against this variation, but at the time there were only very few people who shared this view. Only after, in 2002, Peter Leko gave a perfect demonstration of White's chances in a game with Beliavsky, the other great champion of the Breyer in those days besides Spassky, I decided to publish my 'secret' knowledge of this variation in a Survey for New in Chess (Yearbook 66).

15... ♙g7 16. d5 ♘b6

Eventually, Spassky had found this move before the tenth game of his match with Judit after having gone down in two games with the too-slow 16... ♙f8 and the too-sharp 15... d5, respectively.

Black wants to play 17...c6 and at the same time hinders the supporting move c3-c4. It is the most natural, the optimal move for Black... if it is correct. I had analysed it for many, many hours with Laszlo.

17. ♙e3

This is also what Judit played; an improvement on an old game Unzicker-Tal (from 1960) which had seen 17. ♖e2? c6 18. c4, with the

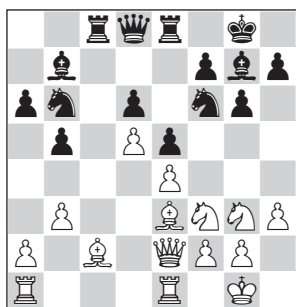
powerful (and highly characteristic for this variation) continuation 18... cxd5 19.cxd5 ♖fxd5! 20.exd5 e4 with advantage to Black.

The logical-looking 17.♙d3 also has the same drawback: 17.♙d3? c6 18.c4 cxd5 19.cxd5 ♖bxd5! 20.exd5 e4.

But there was also an old game Unzicker-Donner (also from 1960) in which Unzicker had played much more strongly: 17.♖b1! c6 18.c4. Maybe because Donner held a draw fairly easily, this approach had received little promotion at the time, but this is the best variation for White.

The difference with 17.♙e3 is that piece sacrifices on d5 (a crucial weapon for Black in many cases) don't work, or don't work well, after 17.♖b1; there is no rook on a1 that can be captured and no bishop on e3 that can possibly be exchanged for a knight.

17...♖c8 18.♙e2 c6 19.c4 cxd5 20.cxd5



It seems as if White has consolidated his central position, but now comes the actual point of Black's play:

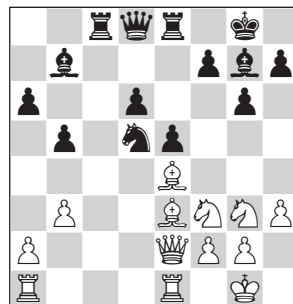
20...♖bxd5!

In the game notes I made for New in Chess at the time (Magazine 2/1994), I admitted in all honesty that I would never have believed this, and wouldn't have dared to play it, if Spassky hadn't given the right example (and if I hadn't analysed it extensively with Laszlo). It is a thematic, absolutely positional sacrifice. All of Black's pieces cooperate well and the centre pawns will soon become very strong.

21.exd5 ♖xd5 22.♙e4!?

But this came as a surprise for me, and I immediately understood that he meant business. After a 'normal' move like 22.♙d2, Black has sufficient compensation for the piece (for example, 22...♖xe3 23.fxe3 ♙xf3 24.gxf3 ♖g5).

Judit had given a third pawn with 22.b4 to get some more air (22...♖xb4 23.♙b3), but this too had proved to be good for Black. Kamsky has the same idea – a counter-sacrifice to avoid handing over the initiative at all costs – but in a much more grandiose version: he sacrifices the queen.



22...♖c3

I understood his intention very well and hesitated for a while about whether I had to push through. After all, I could have played 22... f5 as well. The consequences of both 23. ♖xf5 (23. ♗xf5? fails to 23... ♗c3!) 23... gxf5 24. ♗xf5 and 23. ♖xd5 ♖xd5 24. ♖ad1 ♖a8 didn't seem unfavourable for Black. But probably I felt very strongly that I had to keep hold of the initiative whatever the cost – just like my opponent did.

23. ♖xb7 ♗xe2+ 24. ♗xe2

So as after 24... e4 to be able to play 25. ♗fd4 unchallenged. The alternative 24. ♖xe2 e4 25. ♗d4 ♖c3! leads to big problems for White.

On 26. ♗xe4, 26... ♖xe3 27. fxe3 ♖b6! wins, and if 26. ♖xe4, 26... ♖xe3 27. fxe3 ♖h4!

24... d5!

I preferred losing an exchange to having my central pawns blocked. Until here, Gata had replied immediately to my every move, but now he sank into deep pondering.

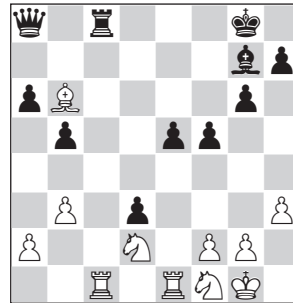
25. ♖xc8 ♖xc8 26. ♖ac1 ♖a8

It's extraordinarily difficult to calculate and assess variations in this position, not only during the game but also in post-game analysis. However, it's clear that both sides must play with a great deal of courage and fantasy, or the scales may tip very quickly in any direction. Here, for example, 27. ♖c7 was not good in view of 27... d4 28. ♖d2 e4! 29. ♗fxd4 ♖xd4 30. ♗xd4 ♖d8 and Black wins. Also 27. ♗g3 d4 28. ♖d2 f5 is not good for White.

27. ♖b6

A powerful move that impressed me at the board, but when I quietly analysed the game at home after the match I thought 27. ♖c5 d4 28. ♗g3 f5 29. ♗f1 d3 30. ♗3d2 would have been stronger.

27... d4 28. ♗g3 f5 29. ♗f1 d3 30. ♗3d2 ♖c8!



The central pawns have been blocked, but they have advanced the maximum distance.

31. b4

A subtle defence against the threatened 31... ♖c2, upon which White now has 32. ♖xc2 dxc2 33. ♖c1 ♖c6 34. ♖c5!. After the more obvious 31. ♗e3, 31... ♖f8 (followed by 32... ♖a3) would have been strong.

31... e4 32. f3

White keeps exerting as much pressure on Black's centre as he can. If Black now 'just' trades on f3, his d-pawn will be weak – if he doesn't, then it is the pawn on e4 that needs protection.

32... ♖xc1?!

For the first time in the game, I made a 'half-move'. What I actually wanted to play was 32... ♖c2!, but I didn't see how to continue after

33.fxe4 ♖c6 34.♙c5. And even though I had the uneasy feeling that I was deviating from the straight line, I eventually 'settled for' 32...♞xc1.

That evening, I discovered with my seconds how I should have done it: after 34.♙c5 in the variation given above, Black has the surprising 34...♙d4+! (which I had missed) when 35.♟h1 ♙xc5 36.bxc5 ♖xc5 37.♞cd1 ♗f2 is highly favourable for Black. White's best chance is 35.♙xd4 ♞xc1 36.♞xc1 ♗xc1 with good hopes of a draw since he has a fortress. After the text move, the game enters a new phase.

33.♞xc1 ♗b7 34.♙e3 exf3

Black's central pawns have been fixed and White controls the c-file. Therefore, I decided to shift my attention to White's vulnerable queenside pawns. The price I'm paying for this is that the white pieces break free. The chances are probably balanced, but it's an extremely fragile balance.

35.♘xf3 ♙b2 36.♞c5

On 36.♞d1, 36...♗e4 is strong. After 36.♞c5, this move would have been powerfully met with 36.♞c8+!

36...♙a3 37.♞c3

Stronger than 37.♙d2 a5.

37...♙xb4 38.♞xd3 ♙e7

Again, we found ourselves in a type of position in which it was extremely difficult to tell what the best move was, both for White and for Black.

39.♘1d2

Was 39.♙d4 stronger here, perhaps?

39...♗c7

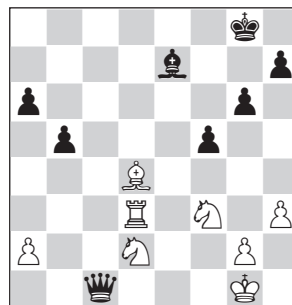
And here, 39...a5 ?

40.♙d4

But this is definitely a risky plan. After 40.♘b3, White is not in danger of losing his a-pawn.

40...♗c1+!

Collecting the a-pawn is not without risk either, but even though I realized perfectly well that the position became dangerous now, I wasn't worried at all. Anyway, the text move was more accurate than 40...♗c2 as this would have allowed White to efficiently regroup his pieces with 41.♞c3! ♗xa2 42.♞c8+ ♟f7 43.♘e5+ ♙e6 44.♘df3.



41.♟f2 ♗c2 42.♞e3 ♟f8

Again, the sharpest move. Black could have maintained the equilibrium with 42...♙c5.

43.a3 ♗a2 44.g4!

White is about to lose his a-pawn, but he is also about to launch a dangerous attack against the black king. The struggle reaches a climax (again).

44...♙xa3!

Naturally, the f-pawn will be weak, but I felt I had to keep control of the e4-square as long as possible

and should avoid my king getting squeezed in by its own pawns. If 44...fxg4 45.hxg4 ♖xa3, White plays 46.♖e2! followed by 47.♗e4 when the white attack runs much more smoothly than in the game.

45.gxf5 gxf5 46.♖e5 ♖c2 47.♖e3 ♖b2 48.♖c5 ♗d3 49.♖c8+ ♔f7

Again, the sharpest move. After 49...♔e7 50.♖g5+ ♖f6 (or 50...♔f7 51.♖c7+) 51.♖xf6+ ♔xf6 52.♖c6+ Black loses his a-pawn and the position becomes drawish.

50.♗g5+ ♔e7 51.♖c7+ ♔e8

52.♗df3 h6?

But here I lost my way in the jungle of variations. I should have played 52...♖f6! 53.♗xh7 (now, 53.♗e6? fails to 53...♗d6 54.♖c8+ ♔d7 and Black wins) 53...♖d8 54.♖a7 b4 and now it's White who will have to tread carefully to stop Black's passed pawns.

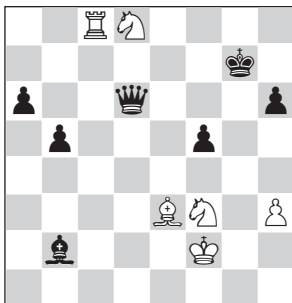
53.♗e6 ♗d6

Here also, 53...♖f6 would have been even better. I simply didn't understand what my opponent was up to.

54.♖c8+

Only here did I see how dangerous the situation had suddenly become.

54...♔f7 55.♗d8+ ♔g7



56.♖f4!

56.♖c7+ ♔g8 wouldn't have been such a problem, but now it starts getting really dangerous. The black queen is driven from its dominating position.

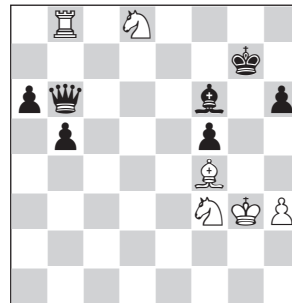
56...♗b6+ 57.♔g3

Now it's White who can permit himself to avoid the draw (57.♖e3 with move repetition).

57...♖f6 58.♖b8

But the choices remain difficult. Should he have played 58.♖c7+ ♔g8 59.♗f7 here? In my New in Chess annotations, I just claimed that Black can defend adequately with 58...♖g7.

With the text move, he tries to drive my queen even further away (58...♗a5), but I understood I couldn't allow that.



58...♖xd8?!

And yet, this is not the best move, even though that was hard to predict at this point (second time scramble, in the midst of a breakneck tactical battle). The idea of the queen sacrifice is good, but I should have played 58...♗xd8!. After 59.♖xd8 ♖xd8, neither 60.♖e5+

nor 60.♘h4 is dangerous and the endgame is a simple draw.

59. ♖xb6 ♙xb6 60. ♙e5+?!

Much more dangerous was 60.♘h4, though Black can hold the draw with accurate play.

As I established in my analysis after the game, 60...b4? 61.♘xf5+ ♕f6 62.♘e3! is not good, but after 60...♕f6 61.♙xh6 b4 62.♘f3 b3 63.♙d2 a5 64.♙c3+ ♕e6 Black is just in time. Both after 65.♘d4+ ♙xd4 66.♙xd4 a4 67.♙b2 ♕d5 68.h4 ♕c4 69.h5 ♕b4 70.h6 a3 and after 65.♘d2 a4 66.♕f3 (or 66.h4 ♙e3) 66...♕d5 67.h4 a3! 68.h5 (certainly not 68.♘xb3? ♕c4 69.♙a5 ♙xa5 70.♘xa5+ ♕c3 and Black even wins) 68...b2 69.h6 ♙a5! Black can just scrape the draw.

60...♕f7 61.♕f4 ♕e6 62. ♙g7 ♙c7+ 63. ♕e3 ♙b6+ 64. ♕d3

Kamsky keeps avoiding the draw, though it's clear that he has no serious winning chances now.

Although the second time control had passed and both of us could probably have used a break with this titanic struggle behind us, we kept playing fast, no doubt because we were both hoping for a misstep by the other.

64...h5 65. ♙c3

A rather pointless move, essentially telling Black, 'You do something'. After 65.♘d4+ ♙xd4 66.♕xd4 b4, the draw would have come into view quickly and clearly.

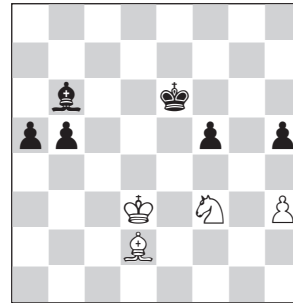
65...a5 66. ♙d2

This, too, was strange, especially because my opponent accompanied

this move with a draw offer when he could simply have forced that result with 66.♘d4+ or even

66.♙xa5 ♙xa5 67.♘d4+.

Somewhere in my head, a light must have turned on – I immediately turned down his offer and decided to finally seal a move.



Only in hindsight do I understand what a historic position this was. It was the last adjourned game in my life! It's very nice that my farewell to this phenomenon, which had brought me so much joy in my career, was so sweet.

66...a4

Initially, when I left the playing hall, I had good hopes of having realistic winning chances in this position (probably because I was brimming with adrenalin), but a brief analysis with my seconds soon calmed me down. Nevertheless, I spent a large part of the evening and especially the following morning getting to the bottom of all the possible variations. The next day, I came to the board without any illusions but armed to the teeth.

67. ♘d4+

Finally this move, but it surprised me a little that he played it precisely in this position. Our analyses pointed out that 67.♖b4 was the most accurate move. After 67...♗d5 68.♘h4 f4 69.♘g6 ♕c7 70.♘e7+ ♖e6 71.♘c6 ♖b6 and only now the liquidation 72.♘d4+ ♕xd4 73.♗xd4, this leads to the same ending, but with a slightly more active set-up for White than in the game. In that case, it's really a dead draw.

67...♕xd4 68.♗xd4 a3

Now there are already ways for White to lose the game; for example, 69.♕c1? b4! or 69.h4? f4! 70.♖e4 f3 71.♗xf3 ♗d5 72.♖e2 ♗c4 73.♕h6 ♗c3 74.♗d1 ♖b2 75.♕g7+ (or 75.♕c1+ ♖a2) 75...♗b1 and Black wins.

69.♖b4 a2 70.♕c3 b4 71.♕a1

But this move suddenly gave me the feeling that Gata hadn't analysed the adjourned position properly! The text move is still not losing, but much more accurate was 71.♖b2 so as to play 72.♕a1 only after 71...♗d6. Then, 72...♗c6 is answered with 73.♖e5! ♗c5 74.♗xf5 ♗c4 75.♖e4, after which the black pawns are blocked and White even wins. Also 72...f4 73.♖e4 is not good, so there is nothing else for Black than to play 72...♖e6 with a draw by repetition.

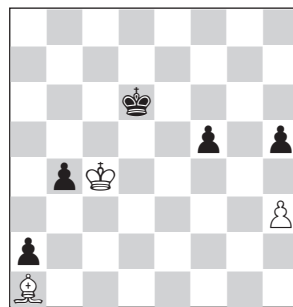
71...♗d6

The big difference is that Black now wins a decisive tempo after 72.♖b2 ♗c6 73.♖e5 ♗c5 74.♗xf5 ♗c4 75.♖e4 with 75...♗b3, so it's not

White but Black who is winning in this variation.

72.♗c4??

Gata had played all his moves after the resumption almost without thinking, and he also made this move immediately. But my heart jumped up with joy when I saw it since I knew with absolute certainty that only 72.h4! still holds the draw in this position. Just like in the variation 71.♖b2 ♗d6 72.♕a1, in that case I would have had to settle for a draw with 72...♖e6 73.♖b2 ♗d6.

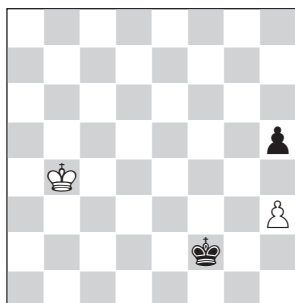


72...♗c6!

With the treacherous point that after 73.♗xb4 the black king breaks through to the king's wing: 73...♗d5! 74.♗c3 ♖e4 75.♗d2 ♗f3 and it's game over. Instead, on a bishop move or 73.h4, Black wins easily with 73...f4 and after 73.♗d4 ♗b5 the black king penetrates decisively on the queenside. So what should White do?

Only now did Gata realize the gravity of the situation and he sank into deep thought. These more than 45 minutes were probably the happiest ones I ever spent waiting

for an opponent's move. I knew exactly how I was going to win.
73. ♖b3 ♖d5 74. ♖xa2 f4 75. ♗f6 f3
76. ♗h4 ♖d4 77. ♖b3 ♖e3 78. ♖xb4
f2 79. ♗xf2+ ♖xf2



And White resigned. The final position had been on my analysis board that morning! Thrills and spills. 1-1.

We started again.

Game 238 King's Indian Defence

Paul van der Sterren

Gata Kamsky

Candidates Match Wijk aan Zee 1994, Game 3

1.d4

I don't remember exactly, but I don't believe our opening choice for this game was under discussion. Never change a winning move, even when it loses.

1... ♖f6 2.c4 g6 3. ♖c3 ♗g7

Gata, too, didn't mind repeating the opening from the first match game – this time, obviously, with the necessary preparation.

4.e4 d6 5. ♖f3 0-0 6. ♗e2 e5 7. ♗e3
♖g4 8. ♗g5 f6 9. ♗c1 ♖c6

That was to be expected. The improvisation 9...exd4 from the first game was not at all bad, but when you get a second chance, it's logical to go for one of the accepted main lines.

10.0-0

By transposition, a position has been reached from what might be called the sister variation of this system: 7.0-0 ♖c6 8. ♗e3.

10...f5 11. ♗g5

After two solid games with Loek van Wely in 1993 (in Wijk aan Zee and the Dutch Championship, see Game 213), I felt quite at home in this position.

11... ♗f6

This is logical and, of course, it's certainly not a bad move, but I still think Van Wely's more ambitious 11... ♖e8 is stronger.

12. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 13.exf5 ♗xf5 14.d5

Exchanging on e5 only gives Black chances.

In the King's Indian, White should mainly rely on his spatial advantage.

14... ♖e7 15. ♖g5

A healthy but double-edged move, and now the game immediately gains a formidable amount of speed. It is clear that White would like to gain control of the e4-square (and perhaps also e6) with 16. ♗d3, but after the critical reply

15...h6

a type of position ensues that occurs rather often in the King's Indian but always remains hard to assess.

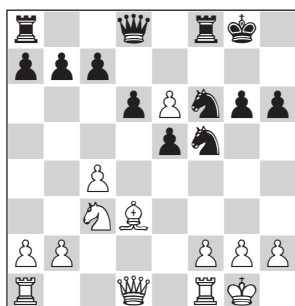
16. ♖e6 ♙xe6 17.dxe6 ♜f5?!

In his rather summary annotations of this game for *New In Chess* (Magazine 2/1994), Gata wrote that he had underestimated my next move and should have played 17...c6 or 17...♙g7, but in *Chess Informant* (59/653), he narrowed this down into the suggestion '17...♙g7!?' without giving any further explanation.

I mainly expected 17...c6 upon which I had planned 18. ♖d2 ♙g7 19.f4.

18. ♙d3!

Putting the finger on the sore spot in Black's position: his damaged kingside structure.

**18... ♜d4!**

A bold reply.

Black offers the g6-pawn in exchange for the e6-pawn. In this way, he maintains a strong central position, and in the long term – who knows? – he may be able to do something nice with the open lines on the kingside.

After 18...c6?!, 19. ♙xf5 gxf5 20. ♖d3 would indeed have been very good for White.

19.f4

I thought long about this move, as, of course, it's a bit crass to ignore an opportunity like 19. ♙xg6.

19... ♙g7

Kamsky, too, keeps playing sharply, not to say provocatively. Probably I had mainly counted on 19... ♖e6 20.fxe5 dxe5 21. ♙xg6 after which the position calms down and White is slightly better.

20. ♖e1

It's starting to look menacing for Black. The pawn on e5 is hanging and 21. ♖g3 is coming.

20... ♖e6 21. ♖g3!

This is not only a strong move, but also the only one (do these qualifications contradict each other or not?).

At first sight, the alternative 21.fxe5 seems to lead to a win for White after 21...dxe5 22. ♖xe5 ♖xd3? 23. ♖ad1! (23... ♖xc4 24. ♖d7+ ♙g8 25. ♖xf6) and to a draw after 22... ♖d4+!. However, instead of 21...dxe5, Black has the incredibly nasty 21... ♜g4!, instantly obtaining a virtually winning position.

21...g5

Again, a highly provocative reply, although it was the only move according to Kamsky. It's true that 21... ♜xf4? loses by force to 22. ♖xf4 exf4 23. ♖xg6+ ♙h8 24. ♖xh6+ ♙g8 25. ♖g6+ ♙h8 26. ♜d5 but I think I mainly expected the more solid 21...e4 during the game. After 22. ♙xe4 (22.f5 ♜g5 23. ♖xe4 ♜fxe4 24. ♙xe4 ♖f6!) 22... ♖xe4 23. ♖xe4 ♜d4! White is slightly better, but not more than that.



22.fxe5??

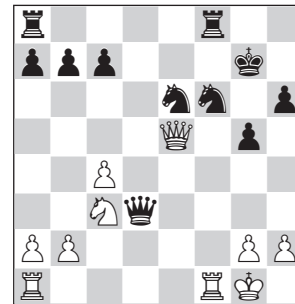
The combination of impending time trouble and my opponent's assertive way of defending must have been too much for me, briefly. Instead of either forcing a draw with 22.fxg5! hxg5 23.♔f5 (23...♖h5 24.♗g4 ♘f6 25.♗g3 with move repetition) or forcefully continuing the attack with 23.♙f5! in this variation, I opted for the 'fatal medium': liquidating into a drawish ending with a combination that turned out to contain a huge hole. Alternating between thoughts like 'I'm going to crush him!' and 'Help, this is going pear-shaped!', I impulsively made a move at the wrong moment: when I was in 'Help!' mode. Had I calmly allowed this state of mind to ease off, I would have automatically blasted back into 'crush' mode and then might have opted for 22.fxg5! hxg5 23.♙f5!. It seems Black has to reply 23...♖h5. Now, after 24.♗g4, both 24...♙xf5 25.♗xf5 ♘f8 26.♙f1 and 24...♘f6 25.♙xg5+ ♘xg5 26.♗xg5+ ♔h8 (or 26...♔f7 27.♙f1) 27.♗h6+ ♔g8 28.♔f5! would have been extremely dangerous, but after 24...♖hf4 the situation remains

tense. Still, to my mind, White has the better chances also here; for example, 25.♙xf8 ♗xf8 26.♔e4 with the threat 27.g3.

22...dxe5 23.♗xe5??

Consistent and therefore fatal.

23...♗xd3!



Naturally I had thought that, just like in the variation with 21.fxe5, I could play 24.♙ad1 here, not with a winning position now but with equality, since I had seen that thanks to the extra move ...g6-g5 Black can play 24...♗g6 (25.♗xe6 ♙ae8 26.♗f5).

But only after he had carried out 23...♗xd3, it dawned on me that Black had an entirely different way of using the g6-square. He can go there with his king!: 24...♗xc4! 25.♙d7+ ♔g6!.

Oh, oh, oh! After 26.♗f5+ ♔h5 White has nothing now: 27.♗h3+ ♗h4 28.♗xe6 ♘xd7 and 'White is busted' (Kamsky).

24.♗xe6

Tantamount to resignation. The game is instantly over after the obvious reply:

24...♙ae8 25.♗f5 ♘e4

White resigned.